

How to Become a Fearless Warrior

By Steve Fraser

A major component of competitive success deals with controlling fear. In wrestling, fear of failure, fear of looking bad, and fear of not meeting expectations all inhibit how a wrestler performs. Fear is a negative emotion that can be controlled (or eliminated) if identified and dealt with.

Remember, when you are in your "ideal competitive state," you have feelings of energy, fun, confidence, courage, strength, relaxation, and fearlessness. Your "ideal competitive state" is the state of being -- physically, mentally and emotionally -- which allows you to perform to the best of your abilities. It is a state of being when you feel your best and enjoy the battle. It is the state of being that all successful athletes should practice getting to upon command. Learning to control fear will help you reach your "Ideal Competitive State."

With that, we look to the U.S. Military for some tried and true exemplary training. The military is all about training young recruits to overcome fear, but not just fear of losing in sport. The military train young men and women to overcome the "fear of death" in combat. If you choke in a wrestling match, you'll likely lose the bout. If you choke in a military battle, you'll likely lose your life.

It really is remarkable how the military can take a young recruit for two or three months and turn a scared, fearful kid into a fearless courageous soldier. A soldier that - without hesitation - will step into battle, putting his/her life on the line. The military training throws light on many key aspects of the toughening process. Training that can be applied to toughening young wrestlers who are stepping into battle putting their reputation on the line.

How does the military do it? How do they take a "fearful adolescent" and make him a "fearless warrior" in just a few short months? According to James E. Loehr, Ed.D, Author of *The New Toughness Training for Sports*, he says: The Art of Soldier Making -- or athlete-making, goes as follows:

1. A strict code of acting and behaving under stress. This includes:
 - A disciplined way of responding to stress.
 - A precise way of walking--head and shoulders erect, chin up.
 - Quick and decisive response to commands--no hesitation tolerated.
2. No visible sign allowed of weakness or negative emotion of any kind in response to stress. The expression of negative emotion is simply not permitted. No matter how you feel--this is the way you act!
3. Regular exposure to high levels of mental, emotional and physical training stress to accelerate the toughening process. Obnoxious drill instructors--very tough individuals in the street sense of the word--provide all three kinds of stress.
4. Precise control and regulation of cycles of sleep, eating, drinking, and rest. The regimen includes:

- Up early and to bed early (lights out--no choice).
 - Mandatory meals including breakfast--no choice about timing, few choices about foods.
5. A rigorous physical fitness program. This essential component of the toughening process involves two elements.
- Aerobic and anaerobic training.
 - Strength training.
6. An enforced schedule of trained recovery. This includes:
- The regimen outlined in 4 above.
 - Regularly scheduled R&R.
 - Enforced cycles of stress followed by enforced cycles of recovery.

These military training requirements seem to be essential when trying to create tough fighting soldiers. The strict code of acting under stress; no visible signs of weakness or negative emotion; and exposure to mental, emotional, and physical training all contribute to the development of fearless attitudes among these GI's.

Now, granted, not all aspects of military training apply to the sport of wrestling, but many elements of basic training provide valuable insights to the toughening process for athletes. Becoming a courageous fighter, and a fearless soldier in battle, is not only the key to battlefield success, but to success in competitive wrestling as well.

I encourage wrestlers to practice these strong discipline traits both on and off the mat. Be on time for practice. Listen to your coaches. Do what is asked of you especially when it is uncomfortable. No matter what your coaches throw at you, be positive. Establish a mind set so tough that nothing can bother you -- you cannot be broken. Get to bed on time, keeping good sleeping habits. Push yourself to your physical and mental limits, then operate decisively and confidently while in that exhaustion zone. Practice good acting skills showing you are always ready and excited for the battle even when you might be feeling poorly that day.

During the tough times, you should practice looking like a soldier, never whining, never complaining, never negative, no matter how bad it gets. Fight your best to the bitter end. As long as there is a second on the clock, give it all you have and you will be the fearless warrior that will take you to the top.